

THE GREAT GOD BROWN

and

LAZARUS LAUGHED

The Great God Brown
and
Lazarus Laughed

• *by*
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THE GREAT GOD BROWN

with

The Fountain

The Dreamy Kid

Before Breakfast

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ONE VOLUME

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HIS MOTHER

DION ANTHONY

HIS FATHER, *a builder*

HIS MOTHER •

MARGARET

HER THREE SONS

CYBEL

TWO DRAUGHTSMEN } *in Brown's office*
A STENOGRAPHER }

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ACT TWO

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EPILOGUE

The Pier of the Casino. Four years later.

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PROLOGUE

SCENE: *A cross-section of the pier of the Casino. In the rear, built out beyond the edge, is a rectangular space with benches on the three sides. A rail encloses the entire wharf at the back.*

It is a moonlight night in mid-June. From the Casino comes the sound of the school quartet rendering "Sweet Adeline" with many ultra-sentimental quavers. There is a faint echo of the ensuing hand-clapping — then nothing but the lapping of ripples against the piles and their swishing on the beach — then footsteps on the boards and Billy Brown walks along from right with his mother and father. The mother is a dumpy woman of forty-five, overdressed in black lace and spangles. The father is fifty or more, the type of bustling, genial, successful, provincial business man, stout and hearty in his evening dress.

Billy Brown is a handsome, tall and athletic boy of nearly eighteen. He is blond and blue-eyed, with a likeable smile and a frank good-humoured face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence. He is in evening dress.

They walk arm in arm, the mother between.

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MOTHER (*always addressing the father*). This Commencement dance is badly managed. Such singing! Such poor voices! Why doesn't Billy sing?

BILLY (*to her*). Mine is a regular fog horn! (*He laughs.*)

MOTHER (*to the air*). I had a pretty voice, when I was a girl. (*Then, to the father, caustically.*) Did you see young Anthony strutting around the ball-room in dirty flannel trousers?

FATHER. He's just showing off.

MOTHER. Such impudence! He's as ignorant as his father.

FATHER. The old man's all right. My only kick against him is he's been too damned conservative to let me branch out.

MOTHER (*bitterly*). He has kept you down to his level – out of pure jealousy.

FATHER. But he took me into partnership, don't forget –

MOTHER (*sharply*). Because you were the brains! Because he was afraid of losing you! (*A pause.*)

BILLY (*admiringly*). Dion came in his old clothes for a bet with me. He's a real sport. He wouldn't have been afraid to appear in his pyjamas! (*He grins with appreciation.*)

MOTHER. Isn't the moonlight clear! (*She goes and sits on the centre bench. Billy stands at the left*

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corner, forward, his hand on the rail, like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge. His father stands in front of the bench on right. The mother announces, with finality.) After he's through college, Billy must study for a profession of some sort, I'm determined on that! *(She turns to her husband, defiantly, as if expecting opposition.)*

FATHER *(eagerly and placatingly)*. Just what I've been thinking, my dear. Architecture! How's that? Billy a first-rate number-one architect! That's my proposition! What I've always wished I could have been myself. Only I never had the opportunity. But Billy – we'll make him a partner in the firm after. Anthony, Brown and Son, architects and builders – instead of contractors and builders!

MOTHER *(yearning for the realization of a dream)*. And we won't lay sidewalks – or dig sewers – ever again?

FATHER *(a bit ruffled)*. I and Anthony can build anything your pet can draw – even if it's a church. *(Then, selling his idea.)* It's a great chance for him! He'll design – expand us – make the firm famous.

MOTHER *(to the air – musingly)*. When you proposed, I thought your future promised success – my future – *(with a sigh)* – Well, I suppose we've been comfortable. Now, it's his future. How would Billy like to be an architect? *(She does not look at him.)*

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BILLY (*to her*). All right, Mother. (*Then sheepishly.*) I guess I've never bothered much about what I'd like to do after college – but architecture sounds all right to me, I guess.

MOTHER (*to the air – proudly*). Billy used to draw houses when he was little.

FATHER (*jubilantly*). Billy's got the stuff in him to win, if he'll only work hard enough.

BILLY (*dutifully*). I'll work hard, Dad.

MOTHER. Billy can do anything!

BILLY (*embarrassed*). I'll try, Mother. (*There is a pause.*)

MOTHER (*with a sudden shiver*). The nights are so much colder than they used to be! Think of it, I once went moonlight bathing in June when I was a girl – but the moonlight was so warm and beautiful in those days, do you remember, Father?

FATHER (*puts his arm around her affectionately*). You bet I do, Mother. (*He kisses her. The orchestra at the Casino strikes up a waltz.*) There's the music. Let's go back and watch the young folks dance. (*They start off, leaving Billy standing there.*)

MOTHER (*suddenly calls back over her shoulder*). I want to watch Billy dance.

BILLY (*dutifully*). Yes, Mother!

(*He follows them. For a moment the faint sound of the music and the lapping of waves is heard. Then footsteps again*

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and the three Anthonys come in. First come the father and mother, who are not masked. The father is a tall lean man of fifty-five or sixty, with a grim, defensive face, obstinate to the point of stupid weakness. The mother is a thin, frail, faded woman, her manner perpetually nervous and distraught, but with a sweet and gentle face that had once been beautiful. The father wears an ill-fitting black suit, like a mourner. The mother wears a cheap, plain, black dress. Following them, as if he were a stranger, walking alone, is their son, Dion. He is about the same height as young Brown, but lean and wiry, without repose, continually in restless nervous movement. His face is masked. The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face — dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life — into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gaily scoffing and sensual young Pan. He is dressed in a grey flannel shirt, open at the neck, rubber-soled shoes over bare feet, and soiled white flannel trousers. The father strides to the centre bench and sits down. The mother, who has been holding to his arm, lets go and stands by the

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bench at the right. They both stare at Dion, who, with a studied carelessness, takes his place at the rail, where young Brown had stood. They watch him, with queer, puzzled eyes.)

MOTHER (*suddenly – pleading*). You simply must send him to college.

FATHER. I won't. I don't believe in it. Colleges turn out lazy loafers to sponge on their poor old fathers! Let him slave like I had to! That'll teach him the value of a dollar! College'll only make him a bigger fool than he is already! I never got above grammar school but I've made money and established a sound business. Let him make a man out of himself like I made of myself!

DION (*mockingly – to the air*). This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father. (*They both stare at him.*)

FATHER (*with angry bewilderment*). What – what – what's that?

MOTHER (*gently remonstrating to her son*). Dion, dear! (*Then to her husband – tauntingly*). Brown takes all the credit! He tells every one the success is all due to his energy – that you're only an old stick-in-the-mud!

FATHER (*stung, harshly*). The damn fool! He knows better'n anyone if I hadn't held him down to common sense, with his crazy wild-cat notions, he'd have had us ruined long ago!